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CHAPTER III

SOURCE, VOLUME, DESTINATION, AND COMPOSITION

The exodus of the Negroes during the years from 1916 to 1918 occurred with such suddenness and attained such an immense volume that for a time it appeared to many observers that the whole "Black Belt" was shifting itself northward. Inasmuch as at the very time this migration reached its zenith this country had just entered into a state of war with Germany, it attracted almost nationwide attention, and from some quarters the fear was that it would have the effect, either directly or indirectly, of obstructing the National Government in its prosecution of the war. Numerous also were the apprehensions of the economic, political, and social problems that might follow in the wake of this movement. On almost every hand, therefore, the discussions concerning this migration became legion, and varying were the opinions expressed regarding its causes and its probable effects upon the sections of the country involved and upon the migrants themselves.

It is uncertain as to the exact time when this movement began, because it was going on some time before any notice was taken of it. It is known, however, that conditions favorable to its beginning were manifest shortly after the outbreak of the European War, when, on account of this catastrophe, immigration practically ceased and thousands of alien laborers departed for their native lands. This caused a serious labor shortage in the Northern industries, and in order to obviate this employers, during the spring of 1915, sent agents into the South to seek Negro laborers. If, as a result of the efforts of these agents, Negroes were induced to go North, then the number of those who moved was so small and in such scattered in-

stances as to make it unworthy of being called a migration. This view is taken because it was not until nearly a year afterward that Negroes began to move in numbers sufficiently large to attract public notice.

The Negro migration in its truest sense, therefore, had its beginning in 1916 and was precipitated as follows: "A national philanthropic organization arranged with some Northern tobacco growers to import Negro students from some of the Southern private institutions for summer work and early in May, 1916, brought the first two trainloads from Georgia. Then the agent of a large Northern railroad, taking advantage of the publicity given this venture, used the name of this organization to get migrants to come North."²⁵ Other railroads and steel mills were also in great need for laborers and thus sent their agents in the South to solicit labor. These agents moved about through the States of the South and offered at first free transportation to the prospective laborers and pictured to them in very glowing terms the high wages and advantages of the North. This they did not have to do very long, "for the news spread like wild-fire. It was like the gold fever in '49. Negroes sold their simple belongings and in some instances valuable land and property and flocked to the Northern cities, even though they had no objective work in sight."²⁶ Regarding this same point, Mr. Ray Stannard Baker holds that during the spring of 1916 "trains were backed into Southern cities and hundreds of Negroes were gathered up in a day, loaded into the cars and whirled away to the North. Instances are given showing that Negro teamsters left their horses standing in the streets or deserted their jobs and went to the trains without notifying their employers or even going home."²⁷

The next question which seems in order is whence came these migrants. As far as is known up to now they came

²⁵ Tyson, F. D., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. of Labor, p. 121.

²⁶ Pendleton, H. B., *Survey*, 37: 569, Feb. 17, 1917.

²⁷ Baker, Ray S., *World's Work*, 34: 315, July, 1917.

largely from thirteen of the Southern States and from those lying mainly east of the Mississippi River. These States are as follows: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—the cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane regions of the South.²⁸ Of these the States which paid the heaviest toll in the number of migrants are Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee. In this respect Mississippi stands first, Alabama second, and Georgia third.²⁹

When we come to the consideration of the number of Negroes who left the South during the course of this movement we find here much uncertainty. This state of affairs is due partly to the fact that the very beginning of the movement was unknown to those who might have been interested in taking a census of those departing and partly to the fact that perhaps after the movement was known to be in operation no counting was resorted to because no one believed that the exodus would amount to anything of importance. When, however, the exodus reached such proportions as to demand serious attention, steps were at once taken to ascertain its volume.

Numerical estimates regarding the size of this migration have been made in different ways.³⁰ In one case they have been based upon the statements of observers who have watched trainloads leave the South, in another they have been based upon the growth of numbers in different Northern cities, in still another upon records of insurance companies, and finally upon the number of railway tickets sold to Negroes. On these bases estimates have ranged from 150,000 to upwards of 750,000. To illustrate this, a few examples will be cited. Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois estimated that 250,000 Negroes had migrated to the North during 1916-17.³¹ The estimate of the Colored Citizens'

²⁸ *Lit. Digest*, 54: 1914, Jn. 23, 1917.

²⁹ Dillard, James H., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 11.

³⁰ Haynes, G. E., *Survey*, 40: 116, May 4, 1918.

Patriotic League was 300,000,³² and that of the Chairman of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes was 350,000.³³ Dr. James H. Dillard set the minimum at 150,000 and the maximum at 350,000,³⁴ and Mr. Ray Stannard Baker put the number up to 400,000.³⁵ From these various estimates given it is at once obvious that no accurate statement as to the number of Negroes who left the South can be made. It is known, however, that a very large number must have moved, because in many instances the Negro population in villages, towns and counties in some of the Southern States was greatly depleted, while the same population of Northern urban communities increased from one to four-fold. The census shows that in 1920 there were in the North and West only 472,418 more Negroes than there were in those sections in 1910. It is clear that a smaller number went North, for there was some natural increase, and we have the fact that many have returned³⁶ to warrant the conclusion.

In this discussion of the volume of the migration it may not be out of place to show how the various States of the South furnished their quota toward making up this total number of migrants. In this regard our data are incomplete in that they were compiled some time before the movement was checked. The following table,³⁷ however, will give one some notion as to the number of Negroes who left each State affected by this movement:

Alabama	90,000	Tennessee	22,632
Virginia	49,000	Kentucky	21,855
North Carolina	35,576	Louisiana	16,912
Mississippi	35,291	Florida	10,291
South Carolina	27,560	Texas	10,870
Arkansas	23,628	Oklahoma	5,836
Georgia	48,897		

³¹ *The Crisis*, 14: 63-66, June, 1917.

³² Horwill, H. W., *Contemp. Rev.*, 114: 299, Sept., 1918.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

³⁴ *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 11.

³⁵ Baker, R. S., *World's Work*, 34: 315, July, 1917.

³⁶ Haynes, G. E., *Survey*, 40: 116, May 4, 1918.

³⁷ *Lit. Digest*, 54: 1914, June 23, 1917.

It has already been indicated that this movement was directed northward, but for the sake of accuracy it is better to say that it was directed toward points in the North and West. The movement was on the whole a great rush on the part of the Negroes to the large cities and industrial centers of these two sections of the country. Within these two divisions the Negroes widely distributed themselves, going as far north as Minnesota and as far west as the Pacific Coast States. In general the destination points of the migrants were found in the following States:⁴¹

California	Missouri
Connecticut	Nebraska
Delaware	New Jersey
Illinois	New York
Indiana	Ohio
Iowa	Oregon
Kansas	Pennsylvania
Massachusetts	Washington
Minnesota	Wisconsin
Michigan	

In this connection there might be raised the question as to the distribution of these thousands of migrants in these States of the North and West; and here again it must be stated that complete and accurate data are lacking, because no thorough study in this regard has yet been made. We have, however, some partial estimates which will go to show something of this distribution of the migrants in the various States. These estimates are for Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Connecticut.

The number of Negroes who migrated to Pennsylvania is estimated at 84,000. Of this number 33,500 were in Philadelphia and 18,500 in Pittsburgh. The other 32,000 migrants were scattered in various numbers in Steelton,

³⁸ Dillard, J. H., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, U. S. Rep. Dept. Lab., p. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Scott, E. J., *Negro Migration During The War*, p. 71.

Harrisburg, Coatesville, Chester, Johnstown, Altoona, Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Easton, Reading, Erie, Oil City, Franklin and Stoneboro.⁴² As many of these returned home or migrated to some other point in the North, even the census of 1920 does not enable one to make an accurate estimate.

The estimated number of migrants in Ohio was 37,000, 10,000 of whom were in Cleveland and 6,000 in Cincinnati. The other 21,500 were located in the following cities and towns: Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Canton, Akron, Middletown, Chillicothe and Portsmouth. More than 3,000 of them were settled in camps of the Baltimore and Ohio and Pennsylvania railroads, and with contractors and traction companies in different places.⁴³

The total number of migrants received by New Jersey was 25,000. Of this number 7,000 were in Newark. Jersey City, Trenton, Wrightstown, and South Jersey had each 3,000. Bayonne, Paterson and Perth Amboy together received 4,000. The rest were scattered in Camden, Carney's Point, and in the railroad camps in Jersey City and Weehawken.⁴⁴

Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Connecticut have the following estimates: Between 1916 and 1918, 23,320 migrants went to Indiana, most of whom stopped in Indianapolis and Evansville;⁴⁵ 24,390 found their way to Michigan and settled for the most part in Detroit;⁴⁶ in Illinois, 24,000 were in Chicago alone;⁴⁷ and in Connecticut the city of Hartford reported 3,200 newcomers among its Negro population.⁴⁸

In order to obtain a comprehensive view of any migration something should be known about its composition as well as its volume. As regards this particular movement

⁴² Tyson, F. D., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

⁴⁵ *Negro Migration*, Rep. Home Missions Council, Jan., 1919.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Tyson, F. D., *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, U. S. Dept. Lab., p. 117.

⁴⁸ Wright, J. A., *Letter on Conditions Among Negro Migrants in Hartford*.

it can be said that first of all it was a mass movement and not a movement of Negro leaders. It was composed of the large numbers of Negro laborers and artisans who, being very sorely pressed by adverse economic and social conditions, as will be shown later on, refused to seek the advice of their leaders, but pushed forward of their own accord with a determination to find the way for themselves.⁴⁹ This great mass, from the standpoint of habitation, was made up of two separate and distinct classes,⁵⁰ namely, rural and urban. The rural class was by far the most ignorant, owing to the lack of educational advantages in the rural districts of the South. They were for the most reared upon farms and their occupation was that of farm labor. It is said also that from this class came the majority of the Negroes who migrated from the South.⁵¹

On the basis of the economic, social and moral status, moreover, the members of this movement were composed of three types.⁵² The first type consisted of the less responsible characters, the younger men, mostly single, who immediately responded to the promises of high wages and of free transportation made by labor agents. It was undoubtedly the presence of this type in such large numbers in the North that led Professor F. D. Tyson, of the University of Pittsburgh, to the conclusion that the outstanding fact of the Negro migration from the South was that it was preponderately a movement of single men; and certainly 70 or 80 per cent of the migrants in the Northern States were without family ties, as is evidenced by the advanced reports of the Bureau of the Census showing a change of sexual ratio of the population of some Southern States.⁵³ Thousands of this type were imported by the railroads to the North, but they proved to be very unreliable workers. They did not stick to their work but moved from

⁴⁹ Du Bois, W. E. B., *Survey*, 38: 227, June 2, 1917.

⁵⁰ Edens, B. M., *Survey*, 38: 511, Sept. 8, 1917.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Haynes, G. E., *Survey*, 40: 116, May 4, 1918.

⁵³ *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, Rep. U. S. Dept. of Lab., p. 145.

place to place, thus furnishing in industry what some have termed the "floaters" or "birds of passage."

The second type was composed of industrious, thrifty, unskilled workers.⁵⁴ These for the most part were men with families or other dependents. It was the custom for the men to go ahead first, earn money, and at the same time observe conditions to ascertain whether they were favorable enough to warrant their sending for their families to join them in the North. If things were favorable, their families soon followed. Many of these, because of hard working and living conditions in the South, were forced to accept, ready, free transportation and promises of work and of high wages just as did the members of the first type. A good many of them, however, had small savings which they used to pay their travelling expenses. In some cases, in leaving their homes, the migrants departed from the usual custom of the men going ahead and leaving the families behind, by taking their wives and children to the North with them in the beginning; in others, only the wives accompanied their husbands, while the children were left behind with relatives or friends to be sent for at some future time.

In the next place, the third type of migrants consisted of a rather small group of skilled artisans, business and professional men who shared the dissatisfaction and restlessness of the common laborers.⁵⁵ For this group, moving from the South became a necessity because the migration had deprived it of the patronage of the rank and file from which its means of subsistence had been derived. Many of these, however, were in good circumstances, having been in possession of good positions, cash money and considerable property. That this was the case the following citations will show: In regard to the economic condition of the Negroes leaving Alabama, the Birmingham *Age-Herald* said, "It is not the riff-raff of the race, the worthless Negroes, who are leaving in such large numbers. There are, to be sure, many

⁵⁴ Haynes, G. E., *Survey*, 40: 116, May 4, 1918.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1918.

poor Negroes among them who have little more than the clothes on their backs, but others have property and good positions which they are sacrificing in order to get away at the first opportunity.”⁵⁶ It is also reported that highly skilled Negro workmen went to Michigan, Ohio, and Massachusetts with fairly large sums of money from the sale of their possessions in the South.⁵⁷ A study of the financial conditions of 2,500 Negro migrants upon their arrival in Coatesville, near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, furthermore, revealed that many had brought with them sums ranging from \$50 to \$150, realized from selling their homes in the South. Their desire was to purchase new homes in Philadelphia, but in this they were disappointed, because very few houses were available for sale or rent.⁵⁸ Migrants of this type gladly sacrificed their means and earnings to leave the South, feeling that by so doing they were making an advance to a life of greater freedom.

⁵⁶ *Survey*, 38: 227, Je. 2, 1917.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40: 116, May 4, 1918.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38: 28, April 7, 1917.